



OKLAHOMA
COMMISSION ON
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

COMMUNITY STANDARDS
FOR YOUTH HOMELESS
SHELTERS

2021



COMMUNITY STANDARDS FOR YOUTH HOMELESS SHELTERS 2021

Community standards for youth homeless shelters were developed as a collaboration of existing youth serving agencies and partners in Oklahoma. The intent is to create a minimum standard of expectations for reasonable care and safety for youth shelters that are not licensed by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS). Additionally, the standards can give the public confidence in the care provided by these organizations and insight to what constitutes appropriate care.

The standards contained herein address important issues that clearly relate to quality youth shelter services and facilities for the homeless. They provide flexibility for homeless shelters in

meeting expectations, significant latitude to identify and organize their own priorities, and guidelines for providing services that are adaptable enough to meet their unique needs and those of the people they serve. The standards are centered around the people that are served by youth homeless shelters and organized around common functions.

The intent of these standards is to build the capacity of all youth homeless shelters to best meet the needs of their residents. These standards carry no statutory authority, no funding component, and no regulatory power. They are simply the minimum standard youth shelters and drop-in centers are encouraged to adopt. These

standards make clear what shelter executives and partners believe to be minimum principles for the care of homeless youth and are not meant to be an exhaustive policy for individual shelters.

It should be noted that if this policy and the organization's policy shall differ, the more stringent policy shall override. The governing authority for these standards is the collective shelter executives and partners themselves, facilitated by the Oklahoma Commission on Children and Youth (OCCY). The standards contained herein were arrived at by consensus and any changes, additions, deletions and/or amendments will be derived by the same body, using the same consensus building methodology.

GOVERNANCE

Oklahoma homeless youth shelters and youth drop-in centers recognize that active, effective volunteer governing bodies are indispensable to the success of the shelter as a business entity. Further, good governance ensures that residents of the shelter receive the care they need and deserve. Finally, an effective governing body comprised of community volunteers who serve without compensation also ensures that employees of the shelter are treated fairly and given the tools they need to perform their functions.

THE FOLLOWING ARE THE MINIMUM STANDARDS PERTAINING TO GOVERNANCE:

- Homeless shelters have a clearly defined governance structure, such as bylaws and policies and procedures, commensurate with their mission.
- The shelter's governance structure recognizes the requirements of the Internal Revenue Service and the Oklahoma Secretary of State for the operation of a nonprofit (where applicable).
- The shelter's governance structure and the names of those individuals responsible are freely available to the public.
- Each shelter will have a written mission statement that clearly defines their role in the continuum of care serving at-risk youth and youth experiencing homelessness.
- The shelter's governing body is described in a written document that contains:
 - organization's role and purpose
 - governing body's duties and responsibilities
 - process and criteria for selecting members of the governing body
 - governing body's organizational structure
 - relationship of responsibilities among those responsible for governing and any authority superior to the governing body (if such exists), the chief executive officer, and other appropriate leaders
 - definition and disclosure of "conflicts of interest" and a means for resolving conflicts of interest



STAFF/PERSONNEL

Oklahoma homeless youth shelters and youth drop-in centers often use a combination of paid professional staff, volunteers, and residents to perform the day-to-day work of caring for those that experience homelessness. Facilitating residents to do these jobs can often help teach the residents job skills as well as instill self-esteem and a sense of accomplishment.

THE FOLLOWING STANDARDS CAN BE ADJUSTED TO APPLY TO THE SPECIAL POSITION OF THE RESIDENT AS EMPLOYEE OF THE SHELTER.

- Each shelter has written standards for staff that shall include at a minimum:
 - Required background checks for all paid staff and volunteers that are engaged with clients and program participants in any capacity.
 - Completed training pertaining to trauma-informed care and universal precautions.
- Shelters may also have written standards for staff relating to age, education, training (CPR, First Aid), donor status, and proficiency in violence de-escalation techniques.
- Shelters will have a written substance abuse policy for both staff and residents.
- Shelters will maintain a staff-to-resident ratio that ensures the safety and security of both personnel and clients. It is expected the client to staff ratio will be no greater than 24:1 at any time. Further, shelters will maintain adequate staffing levels to ensure program goals can be met.
- Where appropriate, shelters will maintain written job descriptions for all staff positions that clearly define roles and responsibilities of positions.
- Shelters will have written personnel policies, set by their governing structure, covering hiring and termination of employees. These policies will comply with all applicable federal and state regulations.

FINANCE

Oklahoma homeless youth shelters and youth drop-in centers are supported by the generosity of the community. Therefore, it is incumbent on the shelters to clearly demonstrate their stewardship of the funds donated by individuals and organizations to sustain their efforts. Most often, financial transparency is achieved through the periodic completion of independent Certified Public Accountant audits of an organization's financial transactions. Due to limited resources, some shelters have chosen to undergo the less rigorous process of a review in lieu of a full scope audit. The accounting review process provides oversight of financial transactions, but does not enable the reviewer to express an opinion on whether financial statements are fairly presented and conform to generally accepted accounting principles.

EFFECTIVE, TRANSPARENT FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING IS CRITICAL TO THE COMMUNITY'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE PLACE OF THE SHELTER IN OUR COMMUNITY.

- Each shelter accounts for its funds in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) published by the Financial Accounting Standards Board.
- Each shelter, with an annual budget over \$1 million, is audited periodically by an independent body. The shelter's governing board determines the frequency of audits and the organization's response to any findings. Copies of the organization's most recent audit are freely available to the public.
- Each shelter annually provides the Internal Revenue Service an accounting of its revenue and expenses in the form of a tax return. Copies of completed tax returns are available to the public for inspection.
- Accounting standards, auditing requirements, and tax returns may be provided for the shelter by its governing authority.

HEALTH

Protecting the health of residents and staff of the shelters is of paramount importance to the community. Because the health status of those who experience homelessness is often compromised by poor diet, substance abuse, mental illness, etc. – establishing mechanisms to maintain residents’ health will aid them in their journey toward secure housing. Further, staff at homeless shelters are often exposed to health risks brought in by residents and establishing policies and procedures to promote health serves to protect staff from unnecessary exposure. Effective policies governing health at the shelters are vital.

EFFECTIVE POLICIES GOVERNING HEALTH AT THE SHELTERS ARE VITAL.

- Each shelter has written standards for the administration of medication. Where medications are dispensed by staff, the written standards comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws. Shelters that facilitate residents’ self-administration of medication have written standards governing the shelter’s role and the liability of shelter staff.
- Shelters that provide health services to clients comply with all applicable provisions of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).
- Each shelter maintains an adequately stocked First Aid kit to respond to minor emergencies and provides staff reasonable training in its use.
- Shelters that prepare and serve food comply with all applicable regulations for the preparation, storage, and service of food. Local county health departments inspect shelter food preparation services regularly and all findings are addressed expeditiously.

“The youth in our community deserve to know the place they are laying their head at night has their best interest at the forefront of their mission. It is our responsibility to give youth a stable and safe place to stay and standards help make sure those expectations are upheld.”

- Jennifer Goodrich, LPC, LADC
PIVOT President & CEO

SAFETY

The community expects that all businesses will operate in a way that preserves the safety and security of its employees, clients, and neighbors. Those expectations are often expressed as municipal codes and ordinances which set minimum standards for operation within the community. Emergency homeless youth shelters (like any other businesses) are held accountable for meeting these community expectations. Emergency shelters in Oklahoma will adopt the following minimum standards in recognition that housing large numbers of people carries added responsibility for ensuring safety.

- Each shelter complies with all applicable federal, state, county, municipal codes, and ordinances for fire, safety, and physical facility.
- Each shelter will develop and maintain a written emergency action plan. These plans include provisions for tiered responses concomitant to the level of disaster. All plans include provisions for evacuation, business resumption, and periodic testing.
- Each shelter will investigate the feasibility of including fire suppression systems with any new construction or renovation. Where financially and operationally feasible, shelters will retrofit current structures with fire suppression systems.
- Each shelter will maintain a written policy governing the storage and use of hazardous materials.
- Shelters’ housekeeping and maintenance functions may be performed by paid staff, residents, volunteers, contract service companies or some combination.
- Effective pest control will be maintained at each shelter.
- Each shelter will enforce a substance abuse policy covering residents, the facility and employees.

RESIDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Emergency homeless shelters exist to serve their residents. For many shelters, building, or re-building, a resident's sense of self-esteem, dignity, and self-worth is a step along the path to rebuilding their lives. Shelters may try to help residents achieve a greater sense of self-esteem by linking expanded privileges to expanded responsibilities. All shelters, however, recognize that every resident has intrinsic value and will be afforded basic human rights.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Shelter residents have a reasonable expectation of privacy and confidentiality. Shelter staff will not disclose the identity of residents without careful consideration and only in cases where the health and/or safety of the resident, other residents, or the community provide a compelling basis for the disclosure. Shelters will establish mechanisms to enable homeless residents to be contacted by interested family, friends or associates on a voluntary basis that preserves residents' privacy. Shelters cannot be held responsible for any breaches of residents' confidentiality that occur as the result of another resident's communications. At shelters where residents perform staff-like functions, professional shelter staff will work with resident-staff to ensure all residents' privacy is respected. At shelters where case management of residents takes place, it is often necessary to share residents' information with case managers with other service providers. Shelters will have appropriate safeguards in place to ensure data shared between service providers is done with the informed consent of the resident.

RESTROOMS

Shelter residents shall be given the dignity to choose what bathroom most closely aligns with their gender or gender-neutral restrooms shall be provided.

GRIEVANCES AND REPORTING YOUTH MALTREATMENT

Shelters will have a clear written policy for resident grievances and appeals. The policy will be clearly communicated to residents, in a language they can understand and acknowledge. Shelters will provide residents with information on how to file a complaint to the OCCY Office of Juvenile Oversight (OJSO) regarding wrongful or unlawful acts (willingly or unwillingly). The OJSO is responsible for investigating Oklahoma's child and youth-based systems. Complaints can be filed by calling (405) 606-4936 or at ok.gov/occy.

BARS AND BANS

Sometimes, in order to protect the health and safety of residents and staff, it may become necessary for a shelter to bar or ban an individual from accessing the shelter. Where shelters employ bars or bans, they will do so under the aegis of a clear, written policy that is available to residents upon request. Written policies governing the use of bars and bans will include some mechanism for appeal, as well as some mechanism to redress or make amends for the infraction or behavior that caused the ban. The policy may include descriptions of some behaviors for which there is no remedy.

SECURE STORAGE

Where operationally and financially feasible, shelters will provide secure storage facilities for their residents' belongings. Though responsibility for all belongings remains with clients, in those cases where the shelter provides secure storage, access to the storage facilities will be strictly limited and each shelter will have some method for maintaining accountability of items stored.

TELEPHONE

Access to telephone communications can be critical to receiving services and maintaining the social network so important to recovery. Shelters will provide telephone access to residents as much as feasible. Telephone access can also be abused and shelters reserve the right to deny telephone access to residents when appropriate.

SERVICE PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS

Shelters may make provision of certain services contingent upon expressed standards for residents' behavior. Where shelters have service participation requirements, they will be clearly communicated to residents, in language they can understand and acknowledge.

OTHER STANDARDS

- Emergency overflow provisions – It is occasionally necessary for a shelter to house more residents than preferable, for instance during seriously inclement weather. A community response is needed to address emergency overflow capacity for homeless shelters. Youth homeless shelters will work in concert with city government and community leaders to devise an acceptable mechanism to provide emergency overflow capacity for the homeless in times of exceptional need.
- Case management standards – The Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers shall be referenced for guiding principles. Section 5.01 of the Case Management Code of Ethics forbids discrimination by case managers. However, some youth shelters may limit populations they serve to a specific age range. The shelter executives assert that case managers should not discriminate within the population served by the shelter, and will continue to limit the populations served by each shelter commensurate with the mission established for the shelter by its governing authority.
- Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) - HMIS is a network computer database system that enables providers of services to homeless and very low-income individuals to share data on shared clients. The HMIS is administered through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and implemented locally through HMIS lead agencies, Continuum of Care (CoC) representatives and vendors. Only shelters accepting HUD funding are required to use HMIS. Shelters that do not accept HUD funding may contact their local CoC representative to learn more about HMIS network opportunities to support resident care.

ENFORCEMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The intent of these standards is to build capacity of all youth homeless shelters to best meet the needs of their residents. These standards carry no statutory authority, no funding component, and no regulatory power. Youth homeless shelters voluntarily working toward achieving these standards may receive formal recognition from OCCY.

Each shelter will be reviewed for compliance with these standards every two years. The review team will consist of (but not limited to) shelter directors, community partners and/or OCCY staff. The review team will complete a Shelter Standards Review. The form may be completed by the agency being reviewed, by telephone interview, virtual interview,

or by onsite interview, at the discretion of the review team and the leadership of the agency being reviewed.

Upon completion of a Shelter Standards Review, the review team will compile a detailed compliance report, as well as a Capacity Building Plan, developed in consultation with the reviewed agency's leadership.

All final reports of the review team will be approved by OCCY and shelter leadership prior to any release of information.





Shelters may use this checklist as a tool to determine compliance with standards.

Date:

City:

Name of Organization:

County:

Address:

Zip:

STAFF/PERSONNEL

- ☐ Written standards for staff background checks and training
- ☐ Written substance abuse policy for staff and residents
- ☐ Meets staff to resident ratio minimum
- ☐ Written job descriptions for staff
- ☐ Written personnel policies covering hiring and termination of employees

FINANCE

- ☐ Accounts for funds in accordance with GAAP
- ☐ Periodic audits by an independent body and available to the public
- ☐ Annual tax return completed and available to the public

OTHER STANDARDS

- ☐ Emergency overflow provisions
- ☐ Case management standards
- ☐ Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
Where applicable

GOVERNANCE

- ☐ Clearly defined governance structure commensurate with mission
- ☐ Governance structure recognizes requirement of IRS and Oklahoma Secretary of State
- ☐ Governance structure and responsible individuals available to public
- ☐ Written mission statement
- ☐ Written description of governing body and staff

SAFETY

- ☐ Complies with all applicable laws for fire, safety, and physical facility
- ☐ Written emergency action plan
- ☐ Investigate feasibility of fire suppression systems
- ☐ Written policy governing the storage and use of hazardous materials
- ☐ Housekeeping functions and performance
- ☐ Pest control
- ☐ Enforcement of substance abuse policy covering, residents, the facility, and employees

HEALTH

- ☐ Written standards for the administration of medication applicable with all laws
- ☐ Compliance with HIPAA (where applicable)
- ☐ Stocked First Aid Kit
- ☐ Compliance with all applicable regulations for the preparation, storage, and service of food

RESIDENTS RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

- ☐ Established mechanism to enable homeless resident to be contacted on a voluntary basis
- ☐ Safeguards in place to ensure data shared between service providers is done with the informed consent of the resident
- ☐ Written resident grievance and appeals policy to include information on filing maltreatment with OJSO
- ☐ Written policy governing the use of bars and bans
- ☐ Service participation requirements clearly communicated to residents
- ☐ Access to telephone communications as much as feasible
- ☐ Provision of secure storage facilities as much as feasible

"By adopting the Youth Shelter Standards, we can provide agencies with compliance support to ensure that all youth are receiving consistent, dependable, and safe shelter with all community participants."

- Jamie Caves, Executive Director
Sisu Youth Services

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